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ABSTRACT

This case study presents a portrait of one English teacher within her school and in her professional contexts. It is part of a series of reports investigating methods of successful English instruction which reconciles professional trends with individual practice. The case study examines data collected during 1996-1998 from the classroom of Gail Slatko, director of reading at Ruben Dario Middle School in Dade County, Florida. Characteristics of classroom instruction include variety in assignments and instructional forms, a focus on reading and critical thinking, and literature as a link between students' personal lives and the world of ideas and places. Slatko's instructional methods are based on beliefs in learning as a vehicle for background building, personal cultivation, individual exploration, and association. Professional influences in the classroom include the school district, colleagues, and professional development activities and conferences. (EF)

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CELA RESEARCH REPORT

ACHIEVING HIGH QUALITY READING AND WRITING IN AN URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL: THE CASE OF GAIL SLATKO

TANYA MANNING

CELA REPORT NUMBER 13001

NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER ON

ENGLISH LEARNING & ACHIEVEMENT

THE UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY ■ THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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The Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA) is a national research and development center located at the University at Albany, State University of New York, in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Additional research is conducted at the Universities of Georgia and Washington.

The Center, established in 1987, initially focused on the teaching and learning of literature. In March 1996, the Center expanded its focus to include the teaching and learning of English, both as a subject in its own right and as it is learned in other content areas. CELA's work is sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, as part of the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment.

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FOREWORD

The school door you will open as you read this case study reveals a very special place. Here students are actively involved in becoming highly literate; they are learning how language works in context and how to use it to advantage for academic purposes. Here, too, teachers are supported in their efforts to improve their teaching and to grow as professionals.

What makes this kind of environment possible? A team of field researchers and I have been exploring this question in a major five-year project for the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA). This case study is one part of that project, which involves 25 other English programs nationwide. Each is providing English instruction to middle and high school students. Most are exemplary; some are more typical and give us points of contrast. Overall our study examines the contexts that lead to thought-provoking learning in English classes and the professional contexts that support such learning. This case report offers a portrait of one teacher within the contexts of both her school and her profession. We offer it to provide food for thought and a model for action for readers or groups of readers who wish to improve the English language arts learning of their own students.

The programs we are studying represent great diversity in student populations, educational problems, and approaches to improvement. The reports and case studies that comprise this project (listed on page 28) do not characterize programs as process-oriented, traditional, or interdisciplinary. Instead, they provide a conception of what "English" is as it is enacted in the classrooms of our best teachers, how these teachers have reconciled the various voices and trends within the professional community in their own practices, how their schools and districts support and encourage their efforts, and how in turn the contexts they create in their classrooms shape the high literacy learning of their students. The results have implications for curriculum, instruction, and assessment, as well as policy decisions, in English and the language arts.

In two cross-cutting reports, I have analyzed the data across all case studies for overarching patterns. In the first, I identify and discuss particular features of teachers' professional experiences that permeate these special programs; in the second, the features that characterize their instruction.

I am profoundly grateful for the cooperation and vision of the teachers and administrators who contributed their time and ideas so generously and so graciously to this project. It was indeed a privilege for the field researchers and me to enter into their worlds of learning – a place I now invite you to visit and learn from in the following pages.

Judith A. Langer
Director, CELA
April 2000

ACHIEVING HIGH QUALITY READING AND WRITING IN AN URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL: THE CASE OF GAIL SLATKO

TANYA MANNING

INTRODUCTION

Gail Slatko is the director of reading at Ruben Dario Middle School in Dade County, Florida.[1] This school, which serves some of the poorest students in the state, serves as a model of excellence – one of the schools spotlighted by Judith A. Langer in her five-year Excellence in English study for the Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA). Ruben Dario students are beating the odds; for example, they score well above the state standard on the mandated Florida Writes! Exam. Located within a crime-ridden area, Ruben Dario is a haven. Discipline and camaraderie reign, and students feel a sense of self-worth and agency about their education and voluntarily participate in numerous before- and after-school activities, including a highly successful tutoring program. Slatko is the director of this tutoring program. In addition, she teaches reading and SAT preparation classes, and her exemplary instruction shows that she wisely implements what she learns from her professional contacts with colleagues, both in school and from a very supportive district office. This case study highlights Slatko's instructional approaches as well as the professional influences that have helped to form and continue to refine her successful teaching practices. First, though, an overview is provided to give readers a sense of the school and district within which Slatko teaches.

DATA COLLECTION AND COMPILATION

Data for this case study were collected throughout the 1996-97 and 1997-98 academic years using a variety of techniques. In an initial interview, Slatko was asked about her perspective on instruction, curriculum, and assessment, as well as what she valued in teaching English/language arts. Her classroom was observed for two weeks each year. During these observation periods,

every professional development event Slatko participated in or facilitated was observed as well. Formal and informal discussions with Slatko during these visits yielded information about how she thought about English/language arts and how she approached teaching. Videotaped class sessions were also viewed.

Information regarding Slatko's reflections on professional conversations, experiences, and their outcomes in the classroom were collected through regular email correspondence. People with whom Slatko had professional contact and conversations were also studied. How these conversations subsequently affected Slatko's classroom decisions were carefully noted.

In addition, twice a month Slatko submitted the work of six selected students from one class each year. The students were chosen because they represented a wide spectrum of academic and social skills. These students also provided reports on their progress in reading via interviews and email correspondence.

THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Ruben Dario Middle School is 45 minutes from Miami's central business district. Just off a major highway, the large white building sits on 10 acres of land. The grounds are litter-free and the building is clean and graffiti-free. The maize and rose colored condominiums surrounding the school were built within the last 20 years to house single families. Now, however, multiple families occupy many of the individual units. Ruben Dario students also come from a nearby trailer park and are bussed from two housing projects within Miami proper – one of which is reported to be among the poorest and most crime-ridden neighborhoods in the city. Nonetheless, the school is safe, happy, and regarded as a haven.

When first entering Ruben Dario, one sees huge glass showcases housing several trophies as well as walls lined with plaques and accolades honoring its academic accomplishments. The school's colors, blue and white, permeate the building. Lockers and floors are deep sky blue, and the walls are painted both blue and white. The halls, lined with windows, are brightly lit.

Of the 2,200 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students enrolled during the 1995-96 school year, 85% were Latino, 10% were African American, 4% were White, and 1% were Asian/Indian/

Multiracial. In all, 47 nations are represented at Ruben Dario. Nicaragua is the most represented country. Most of the students are Spanish speakers. Many are immigrants with few or no family members who speak English proficiently. Almost 14% of the students are identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Approximately 80% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, which is the highest percentage in Dade County (the fourth largest school district in the nation).

Ruben Dario's faculty is diverse. Of the 82 teachers, 37% are Latino, 35% are White, 27% are African American, and 1% is Asian. Almost 40% of the teachers are male. There is a feeling of genuine rapport among the administrators, teachers, and students. Though teachers may sometimes clown around with or act very maternal/paternal with their students, they also expect and demand disciplined behavior.

Disciplinary and attendance problems are minimal at Ruben Dario. The faculty characterize the students as very obedient, well-behaved, and respectful of staff, peers, and the school grounds. Teachers say the students maintain an inner locus of control in monitoring their own behavior.

The school has a very low percentage of students failing – only 1.2%. The average percent of dropouts is low as well, 2.2%. This low rate seems to be due to the staff's dedication and commitment to not letting students "fall through the cracks."

Ruben Dario is a middle school with a mission. Built in 1989 and chartered at that time as a Title I school, it developed the following mission statement that so impressed some teachers they volunteered to join the new staff:

> To join efforts with the parents and representatives of the community in providing a productive learning environment that:
>
> Promotes critical thinking across curricular areas while enhancing reading, writing, and mathematics . . . .
>
> Integrates learning technologies into the curriculum through interdisciplinary instruction . . . .
>
> Improves student self-esteem in a multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual community . . . .
>
> Emphasizes the professional development of highly qualified educators.

Ruben Dario's overarching goal is to help students become readers and critical thinkers. In addition, the school also focuses on the affective development of each student. Using its Title I

monies and other resources wisely, the school offers students a variety of learning tools and programs. For example, there are computers in every classroom (more than 200 throughout the school) and each classroom also has its own library of books. Students receive a "Passport" each year, which serves as a notebook-sized learning and organizational resource. The Passport contains the school rules, information about school/community offerings for youth and adults, places to record student achievements, explanations of essential learning skills such as managing time, anecdotes for learning, important facts, and a large area for recording homework assignments. The Passport explains the school's philosophy of education:

> An effective middle school addresses the educational, emotional, social, and developmental needs of students who are in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade by providing meaningful experiences designed to assist them in making the transition from childhood to adolescence.
>
> Teachers from different subject areas, responsible for a common group of students, are organized into interdisciplinary teams to provide students with a variety of instructional practices that accommodate their unique learning styles. Critical and creative thinking skills are infused through the curriculum, subject areas are interrelated through thematic units of instruction, and an advisement program is provided to assist students with the developmental and adjustment issues common to their age group.
>
> Home-school partnerships are essential to successful middle schools. Parental involvement opportunities are provided through subject-area teachers, teams, special clubs, and the school's volunteer program . . . .
>
> All students . . . belong to a team and to an Advisor/Advisee group. These groups consist of students who interact directly with their home room advisor each day. Activities are planned to enhance character development by focusing on courtesy, responsibility, reliability, respect, solving conflicts peacefully, and, above all, building feelings of self-worth (Student Passport, 1996).

Although only 14% are officially designated as LEP, most Ruben Dario students do not speak English as their first language. In response to this need, the school developed a multi-tiered Limited English Proficient (LEP) program. Students attend a three-year program and take written and oral tests at the end of each year to see if they are ready to move on to the next level. In levels one and two, they take an English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) reading and language course. Their math, science, and social studies courses are taken as Bilingual Curriculum Content (BCC) classes, in which the teacher teaches in English and Spanish. By the

third level, students are taught math, science, and social studies in English, but they continue to take ESOL for two periods. During the fourth level, they take only one period of ESOL. The students also take two electives each year that are taught in English.

Ruben Dario also runs a very successful before- and after-school tutoring program. Although the school day starts at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 3:40 p.m., students line up as early as 7:00 a.m. for the school's tutorial program, which runs from 7:20-8:40 every morning. Students also come in droves of as many as 50 for after-school tutorial help from 3:45-4:45 Mondays through Thursdays. Students can come for assistance in science, math, language arts, and LEP coursework. They can also come to use the word processors for typing school-related projects. The tutorial program is not mandated; students come as often as they like. Some come daily and others come only when they have a particular question or problem with their homework. Besides gaining a better proficiency in their subjects, students also receive a "Jaguar Card" (a jaguar is the school mascot) each day they come to a tutorial. The cards can be redeemed for rewards such as school supplies or water bottles. According to Slatko, who oversees the tutoring program, the teachers who teach the tutorials are extremely dedicated and talented. She cited one teacher who has managed to motivate even the most unruly and resistant students. They come willingly and frequently to his morning tutorials, eager and ready to learn.

There is schoolwide support for reading at Ruben Dario as evidenced by the many activities designed specifically to encourage reading and to keep it a top priority for everyone. For example, each Wednesday everything stops at a specified time for a schoolwide sustained silent reading period. Another way the school encourages reading is by using Title I monies to purchase thousands of books spanning literature to textbooks and by sponsoring activities that promote reading within the school and community. On "Book Night," students and their families come to the school and choose free books from an array of selections. Reading has become a substantial part of the curriculum not only in language arts classes but in other subject areas as well. For example, along with several other language arts teachers, Slatko introduced a computer reading program. In addition Slatko, who is the school's Title I grant writer and budget supervisor, purchased a computerized reading comprehension assessment and had it networked throughout the school so that teachers could use the data to monitor student performance.

Three years ago, Ruben Dario implemented a block schedule. Classes now last from 90 to 120 minutes on alternating days. Teachers feel that this longer amount of time allows them to delve more deeply into their lessons and has enabled students to learn more.

The school works hard to prepare students for standardized tests, and it has been recognized for its above-average performance on these tests. For example, in eighth grade, students take the state-mandated Florida Writes! Exam, which assesses persuasive writing, and Ruben Dario students have repeatedly scored above the state median and higher than students in similar schools. Florida's standard for eighth grade is 50% of students scoring 3 or higher on a scale of 0-6, and in 1997, 86% of Ruben Dario's eighth graders scored 3 or higher.

The school also works to involve parents through programs such as the Community Involvement Staff (CIS). The three CIS staff members act as liaisons between the school and parents, helping to keep parents informed of the various programs the school provides to foster student achievement.

Students may choose from approximately 30 extra-curricular school clubs, including jazz band, drama, reading, and multimedia. There is an in-school Chamber of Commerce, a 500 Role Models Chapter, a Future Educators Club, and a Future Business Leaders of America Club. Also, in conjunction with the Department of Parks and Recreation, the school provides students opportunities to participate in a variety of sports activities, including baseball, basketball, and cross country.

Ruben Dario is run through cooperative team efforts. Teachers and department heads meet weekly in either Teacher Ambassador Council meetings (consisting of 12 interdisciplinary teams) or Curriculum Ambassador meetings. Department meetings occur monthly. Teachers discuss, share, and plan together a great deal. Indeed, teacher enrichment is a major focus within the district and at the school. The district provides many inservice learning opportunities and recently adopted a professional development plan requiring three meetings/inservices sessions per semester. Students are released early for these sessions, and teachers participate in presentations regarding test preparation, interdisciplinary thematic units, and successful teaching strategies. Presentations are given by veteran teachers, such as Slatko, as well as school and district administrators. In addition, teacher representatives often attend professional development conferences at minimal cost to themselves – one of the many uses of Title I monies. Ruben Dario

is often asked by the district and other educational agencies to pilot various programs. For example, the school was recently selected to try several different literature-based textbooks and curriculum materials. It is also currently testing a new professional development assessment model that incorporates collaboration between reviewers and teachers.

Ruben Dario teachers also have access to up-to-date technology. They often make use of the teachers' room in the Media Center/Library where they can use a variety of software. In conjunction with the school media and technology specialists, Slatko created a series of meetings for teachers on computer fundamentals so that teachers could better take advantage of the computer's instructional and management capabilities.

Gail Slatko, Director of Reading

In 1997 Slatko received the Bertha Shouldice Reading Teacher of the Year award. Helping children learn to read successfully has been the primary focus of her twenty-year career. In 1977 Slatko received her combined bachelor's and master's degrees from Florida State University, initially focusing on special education. During the fifth year in her combined program, she added the teaching of reading to her studies. She is, therefore, certified to teach reading as well as to teach learning disabled, retarded, and emotionally handicapped students.

Slatko has taught various grades and populations of students, spanning special education, exceptional education, PSAT and SAT preparation, language arts, reading, and creative writing classes. Most of her years she has taught compensatory Title I students.

She joined Ruben Dario when it first formed, in 1989, as a resource room teacher. Slatko described this role as primarily teaching students how to read textbooks across the content areas, using such strategies as graphic organizers and note taking. During the last several years, Slatko has taken on more administrative responsibilities. At the time of this study, she served as the school's director of reading and its grant writer, also teaching a sixth grade reading elective and an eighth grade reading/SAT preparation elective, directing the before- and after-school tutorial program, and coordinating the affective development exercises for the school's Advisor/Advisee program.

Advisor/Advisee Program. Several years ago Dade County mandated that each middle school set aside a time every day devoted to developing the affective aspects of students. Ruben Dario is one of the few schools in the county that continues to do this, and it does so through its Advisor/Advisee program. Students meet with their teacher/advisors during home room period each day and work together on activities designed to promote character development and self-worth. Slatko is responsible for planning activities for all the home room teachers each week. She describes the activities she develops this way:

> Usually Mondays they're doing some kind of [character development] activity that deals with peer pressure or conflict mediation. Wednesdays we have sustained silent reading, where the whole school stops what they're doing, and everybody reads. I worked out a schedule where the counselors and the administrators walk around the building during that time. If they walk in a room and everybody is reading, they give them a 100% participation certification. We try to make a big deal about getting 100% participation. Another day during home room they produce a [TV] show – we have our own TV studio in the school. I try to have one day in which the kids pick their activity, and then another day . . . a team activity where the team leaders, if they're doing a special event, something interdisciplinary they want to work on, they can do it during that time. Everybody gets a plan . . . every week of the year. I write the plans on a weekly basis, and put them in the [teacher/advisors'] mailboxes (Slatko Interview Transcript).

How English Is Taught and Learned in Slatko's Classroom

Slatko's focus on reading is evident in both her sixth grade reading class and her eighth grade SAT preparation class. In both arenas, she makes sure that class activities – silent reading, buddy reading, vocabulary lessons, analogies, group presentations, writing assignments – are related to and support students' interest in and progress in reading. In the SAT preparation class, students learn about the test and work on analogies, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. However, while the class is characterized as a year-long test preparatory course, what the students are being prepared for goes beyond taking an exam; students learn how to become critical thinkers and readers.

Slatko's approach to teaching reading is student-based. By assigning projects that require students to take responsibility for their learning and that encourage exploration and creative thinking, Slatko helps her students learn and demonstrate high-level thinking and reading. Active learning and working – rather than the kind of passive learning that results from simply listening to lectures – is the vital foundation of her curriculum.

Consistent with this student-based approach, Slatko begins the year by surveying her students to find out their skills, aptitudes, interests, and study habits. On one survey, she asked students to provide her with an inventory of how they go about preparing for tests, when they study, and how they do their homework assignments. She created another survey to find out students' feelings about and experiences with reading. It included the following questions:

- How do good teachers encourage kids to read?
- In what ways do teachers turn kids off toward reading?
- What type of reading activity is your favorite?
- How would you help a friend who is a poor reader?
- What can reading do for you in the future?
- Name the best book you have ever read.
- Who is your favorite author?
- What book would you like to read next?
- How did you learn to read? How old were you?
- Who/what is your source of books?

The information from these surveys has informed Slatko's classroom decisions. She has structured her curriculum so that reading has taken on a variety of shapes and applications that will interest her students, including allowing for a combination of reading individually, in pairs, and in groups. In many ways her expectations have been met. For example, a number of students now read avidly, and when paired with a buddy reader are enthusiastic in sharing their reflections about their books.

Slatko's classes begin each day with four analogies written on the board that compare either words or symbols to one another. The first ten minutes of class are quiet as students think of possible answers. Then Slatko opens the class to discussion about the associations they've made.

As students volunteer their responses, she asks them why and how they made their connections. These "warm-up exercises" often offer good and rigorous debate. When responses do not match those suggested by the publisher yet are argued well, Slatko considers the answer to be just as right. She then asks the class if the exercise was difficult and how many correctly figured the answer. She collects the answers each day, which combine to form one part of the students' final grade.

Reading

To insure that students read outside of class and that they read every day, Slatko instituted the "Accelerated Reader" program. First, students are tested by a computerized assessment program, STAR. (Slatko purchased STAR for the entire school. It assesses a student's reading level via comprehension exercises). Based on their STAR test score, students are provided with a wide-ranging list of novels at an appropriate level. The lists include novels such as *Sounder*, *Tom Sawyer,* and *The Giver*. Upon selecting and completing a book, students take a computerized test with multiple choice questions on the events, characters, and vocabulary in the book. A perfect score is 10, and students are required to earn at least 40 points during each nine-week marking period. As a result, students are responsible for reading at least four books every nine weeks, making Slatko's class a very rigorous reading course.

However, simply reading and answering comprehension questions about their books is not enough. Slatko also puts a great deal of emphasis on helping students learn to respond personally to what they are reading. She encourages them to become conscious of how the reading relates to and affects them, to reflect on their personal reactions to what's happening in the story. She does this primarily through a strategy called reader response, which she learned about through the district language arts office. While students read their books, they must write reader responses. In these exercises, students create a dual entry page: the left column contains an excerpt from the book, and in the right column students write their responses or reflections about the excerpt.

Slatko gives students suggested prompts for these personal responses that encourage important reading skills: predicting, clarifying, questioning, relating, contesting, and thinking

critically. Sample prompts include: "I believe . . ."; "I also wonder . . ."; "One word/phrase I do not understand is . . ."; "This reminds me of . . ."; "If the setting were . . . the story would be different because . . ."; "I couldn't imagine . . . ." For example, in Slatko's sixth grade reading class, one of her student's, Marcela, wrote the following response as she was reading *The Babysitter*:

> *I thought* . . . that Jenny has to much stuff to worry about to be a babysitter because she is worried about boyfriends and her mom so I don't think she should work on babysitting.

Sometimes Slatko's students write reader response letters to other students. Paired with students at similar reading levels, "reading buddies" read a book together. They work out a plan together for how much they will read per night – typically a chapter – and after each chapter, they write letters to each other. These letters contain reflections, feelings, questions, and opinions about what transpired in the book.

Students also address some of their reader responses to Slatko herself. Slatko then writes responses back in what becomes a very meaningful literary exchange, as can be seen in the following samples from three students in her eighth grade class:

> Dear Ms. Slatko:
>
> What I read this weekend made me realize the terror and braveness that people went through. While I would be reading I would feel like I was there looking at all the things that were going on. I would get goose bumps when I read about the coldness of the water when people jumped in. I recall the people saying the water felt like getting stabbed by thousands of knives. I felt sorry for those people who didn't make it. "The unsinkable ship" proved to be sinkable.
>
> Your Student,
> William Cantos

> Dear William,
>
> I'm happy to see that you are not only enjoying the events of the story, but are learning to appreciate the writer's craft. The simile you mentioned is quite vivid.
>
> GS

Dear Ms. Slatko,

I have just finished reading this book. Even though I had read this book before, I noticed new things this time. It's very funny the way the author uses the characters and places to teach a lesson as well as to tell a story. There must be many kids like Milo all over the world. I would recommend this book to anyone.

Your buddy,
Alessandra Nunez

It is a book definitely worth rereading.

GS

Dear Ms. Slatko,

What I read today made me think about how undaunted, bad mannered people can be. Similarly, it also made me think about how other people can be so educated, and impatient. What do you think? I also wonder what was the meaning for the Asian pilot to kidnap the plane, I hope I find some more answers as I read. I think the monks who took them to their temple were somehow behind or in agreement with the pilot. I didn't know the words fluttering and limb. Can you tell me what they mean?

Write back soon.

Your student,
Luis Santos

Dear Luis,

Are you reading *Lost Horizon?*

Yes, the world is made up of so many different personalities. How do you think some people became cruel and others kind?

Fluttering means a gentle movement like butterfly wings or leaves in a breeze. A limb is an arm or a leg.

Your teacher,
Ms. Slatko

From their letters, one can tell that these students are highly capable of "reading themselves" as they read a book, and in communicating what they are learning. They have meaningful "conversations" with Slatko. They identify the devices an author uses to tell a story, create character sketches, identify literary elements, extend what they read into questions, and philosophize about the human condition. The content of students' reader responses shows that, even with varying reading levels and abilities, they are able to discuss beyond the level of simply

summarizing and can articulate focused responses and critiques. Slatko gives all of them voice and access to expressing their thoughts the best ways they can as they attempt to reach and finally achieve more highly structured language competency. She doesn't "basal them down," but instead invests them in real life reading and meaning making activities.

Student-based Learning

Slatko believes in student-based learning. In other words, she believes that students learn best when they are given opportunities to construct their own learning experiences. She sets the stage for what is to be learned and the criteria the students should meet, but the extent of students' learning is based on how far they choose to take themselves individually and collectively. For example, in an effort to broaden the scope of books that her sixth-grade students were selecting for their reading, Slatko developed a project requiring groups of students (who were at similar reading levels) to read a book together and then present (or advertise) that book to the class. The groups knew that their goal was not only to read and understand the book (and ensure that all group members comprehended its meaning) but also to present the book in a way that would encourage other students in the class to choose and read the book at a later time.

First, Slatko invited a representative from the district language arts office to model "reciprocal teaching" to her students. The reciprocal model teaches students how to teach each other to strategically read a novel. Students learned how to facilitate discussions about books using four strategies – predicting, clarifying, visualizing, and summarizing. Students first practiced the model using skill-building exercises: they read short passages about the Titanic and inventors and used the model to discuss them. After becoming familiar with the model, the student groups then began to apply the model to their group reading and discussions. As students read their novels, they used the reciprocal teaching strategies to discuss their novels within their groups. They also wrote reader responses to one another that included current reflections and questions about the novels.

When they finished their novels, Slatko scheduled a presentation day. Students arranged their chairs in a semicircle, a seventh grade language arts teacher came to watch, and each group

presented their novel to the rest of the class. The presentations were not only fun and creative, but they revealed students' clear understanding of their books and included highly literate discussions.

The first group read *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. As the group spokesperson gave a narration of the plot to the audience, the others pointed and referred to their 3-D illustration of a house. The group then answered questions about what they learned from the book. Students shared comments such as "They were willing to sacrifice everything for the land that they kept for generations." "It teaches you morals; that you can do anything that you put your mind to." and "Never to let anyone put you down, no matter who you are."

The second group read *The Boy Who Reversed Himself*. Their presentation took on an actual talk show format, including a host, guest speakers, commercials, and "applause" cues for the audience. When asked their assessment of the novel, they responded that while they would recommend the book, it was difficult and complicated because it talked about various dimensions.

The third group decided to read two books with a similar theme, *Here at the Scenic-Vu Motel* and *The Outsiders*. For their presentation the students compared and contrasted the two books and discussed a 3-D model they made that paralleled a scene from both books.

The fourth group presented their book, *The Night Swimmers*, in the form of a board game. They designed a detailed game board illustrated with scenes and excerpts from the book, including a model of a swimming pool in the center of the board. They also created corresponding playing cards and a manual.

The fifth group read *Number the Stars* and presented their book in the form of a diary. For each chapter of the book, they created a diary page written in the voice of the main character. One group member read a page of the diary while another then explained the context of the entry.

After the presentations, Slatko gave the students two ways to evaluate what they had learned from this project. First, they took a test on their book through the computerized Accelerated Reader program. Second, they completed a self-assessment form by answering the following questions:

- What was your presentation?
- What responsibilities did you take in planning and presenting? Be specific.
- What's your honest opinion of your group's presentation?

- What challenges did you face in planning and presenting?
- What are you most proud of?
- Would you have preferred doing this presentation project by yourself or as a group? Why?
- How did your presentation reflect the theme or most important ideas in your novel?
- What did you think about reading a novel as a group activity?
- Did it help your understanding and enjoyment of the novel? How or how not?
- What were the negatives of doing it this way?
- What's your opinion of the book you read?
- Do you prefer reading alone, with one partner, or as a group? Explain.
- Any additional comments/suggestions?

Another example of a successful and authentic student-based project is the children's book project Slatko assigned her eighth grade class. Dade County held a competition for the best children's book, and Slatko saw this as an opportunity for students to practice writing for a specific audience. She introduced the assignment by reading a book she had purchased at a book fair that had been written by children. The book was about animals, and it used abundant alliteration. Slatko charged her students with creating a similar book that they could enter in the Dade County Fair. Students were to choose a theme, write 10 questions and answers using alliteration, and illustrate the text. She pointed out that students would need to keep their audience – young children – in mind as they wrote their text. They would need to use words that would keep a child's interest and so should try to use vivid verbs. She explained that because the books would potentially be read by a public audience, students would need to use dictionaries and thesauruses to be sure their spelling and word use were correct. As students worked on these books in groups and then individually, Slatko aided and guided them, reminding them, for example, to try to plan their book just as they would plan a Florida Writes! Exam essay and so to consider how they were going to prove their points. When students completed their books, five were selected to be entered in the fair, and one of these books won first prize in the fair competition.

Strategies and Skills

Slatko teaches strategies for reading and writing that help students gain the skills they need in order to progress as literate readers, writers, and thinkers as well as to succeed on standardized tests, such as the SAT and the Florida Writes! Exam. Slatko first directly teaches these strategies and skills – such as, for instance, how and when to highlight when reading, how to deconstruct a reading passage into specific literary parts, and how to write a persuasive essay. These strategies and skills are not taught within one specific unit but in recurring mini-lessons throughout the year. She gives students specific opportunities for practicing these strategies and skills, and she helps students identify when and how to use them as they work on class projects during the year such as the group reading project and children's book project mentioned above.

For example, Slatko helps her students learn the skill of identifying the main idea in newspaper articles and other reading passages via a "main idea table." Students look for the "top of the table," the main idea, as well as the "legs," the substantiating details/proofs. Slatko helps students use this idea of a main idea table not only for reading but for writing as well. After students used this strategy in a writing assignment, they completed self-evaluations on their writing. Their comments reveal how the strategy of identifying both the main idea and its substantiating details had become a part of their thinking. They reported, for example, that they noticed unnecessary repetition in their writing, a need for more details, and the need to more clearly express their ideas.

Another interesting strategy that Slatko teaches her class is how to create writing prompts, such as those used on standardized tests. The activity of creating a prompt is designed to help students stay mindful of the content, purpose, and tone of writing prompts when they appear on tests such as the Florida Writes! Exam.

Yet another writing and reading strategy Slatko teaches is called "magnified moments." Slatko assigns this exercise to give students practice in writing to a prompt and to do so with vivid and engaging language. Slatko will ask students to select a sentence from an essay or book they are reading. They are to then expand the sentence into a paragraph. The following is an example of eighth grader William Cantos' magnified writing piece. The sentence prompt came from the book he was reading for the Accelerated Reader program:

"In boat after boat the story was the same: a timid suggestion, a stronger refusal, nothing else."

After the sinking of the Titanic life boats slowly drifted in the ocean. An hour later, passengers on some lifeboats made a timid suggestion to go back to the wreck to see if they could save some lives, but there would always be a stronger refusal not to go back. Passengers on lifeboats were basically afraid that the survivors would tip the lifeboats over. So they didn't want to risk their lives trying to save others. At the end, nothing was done. The cries of the survivors near the wreck in the icy waters faded away. Slowly, the dark night became calm.

Cantos' paragraph contains several literary elements, that Slatko makes it a point to cover in her curriculum, including narrative voice, imagery, emotion, metaphor, and conflict.

By teaching strategies and skills such as the main idea table and magnified moments, Slatko helps students learn to identify the main idea of a text or how to write more effectively. In addition, it also serves as a way to give students contextualized practice for tests – both Slatko's class tests and upcoming statewide standardized exams: the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and the Florida Writes! Exam. The FCAT tests students' ability to comprehend reading passages, and the Florida Writes! Exam assesses their ability to write a persuasive essay. Slatko's strategy exercises serve the triple purpose of preparing students for upcoming exams, helping students become better writers, and enabling students to understand a written piece by and through its parts.

Vocabulary

Slatko feels that vocabulary acquisition is important to students in both her sixth grade reading class and in her eighth grade SAT preparation class, and she works to find creative ways to encourage students to learn new words as well as understand *how* to learn new words.

For example, her eighth grade students created vocabulary mobiles. Using hangers, yarn, construction paper, and other materials, students hung prefixes they'd learned from their SAT workbooks, such as *ex-*, *tri-*, *bi-*, *pre-*, and *auto-*, and then added words using the prefixes.

Students also work regularly on their individual "living dictionaries." Each page of this student-decorated dictionary is devoted to one letter of the alphabet. When students find a new

word when they are reading, they add it to their living dictionary. They write the word, the source from which they found the word (magazine, book, newspaper), and the definition. They then create a symbol to put the word in context. The greatest source of vocabulary comes from the novels students read for the Accelerated Reader program. With 20 years of experience as a reading teacher, Slatko knows that students will learn new vocabulary more effectively if they learn it in the context of their everyday reading – from novels, newspapers, and magazines – rather than just from their SAT workbooks; hence these "living dictionaries."

When Slatko's sixth graders worked on a unit entitled "Unwrapping Ancient Mysteries," they created something they coined "Egyptionaries" to demonstrate their understanding of new vocabulary in the unit. Using index cards they wrote vocabulary words, definitions in their own words, sentences using the new vocabulary, and illustrations.

Peer Groups

One of Slatko's strongest characteristics as a teacher is her ability to encourage students to learn from and work with each other. Students are often divided into small groups or pairs to exchange ideas about literature, read passages together, and think together about how to complete a particular task. This kind of group work enables students to express their ideas and listen to and assess each other's thoughts and approaches. It serves as a forum for students to exercise their thinking. For example, during one observation of her sixth grade class, students were divided into pairs and within these pairs made a plan for starting a business of selling pies (based on the life of a character in "The Star Fisher," which they had just read). They also needed to create steps for how to solve a real life problem. Another day groups in this class pieced together each other's knowledge through a jigsaw exercise in which each student was required to read a selected portion of a text and then teach that portion to the rest of the group members. Buddy reading and the group novel project discussed above are other ways students share reading experiences.

Assessment

Dade County requires that teachers give students a minimum of two grades a week, as well as a midterm and final exam each semester. Slatko's weekly grades come from homework or classroom exercises, e.g., Accelerated Reader tests, worksheets, daily analogy work, essays, and reading logs. Her examinations are cumulative and test a variety of skills and competencies.

Because many of her assignments are project based, Slatko uses specific rubrics to assess student projects. When assigning the project, Slatko gives students a rubric showing the criteria necessary for earning various grades. For example, when Slatko assigned the children's book project, she gave students a list showing what she would be looking for when grading the completed book: cover page, title page, colorful illustrations, visual appeal, typed text, at least 10 questions and answers using alliteration, an obvious theme, mechanics, and creativity. Zero to five points could be earned for each part, with up to forty-five points total. Students as well as Slatko assessed themselves on each part, which gave them the opportunity to take stock of their performance. Students also answered several questions about their performance and about the project itself (e.g., whether they recommended that the project be assigned another time).

Slatko constantly requires students to reflect on their own learning process. Daily reader response logs provide students with the space and opportunity to venture into and explore how they think and what they think about what they read. Periodically for class assignments, and always for major ones, Slatko requires students to write an evaluation of what they have learned, as well as first person accounts of their performance in the midst of their learning process. The evaluation sheet usually consists of five questions and provides both Slatko and her students with some insight into what was done well, what needs improvement, and what was learned, as shown in the sample below:

- How much time did you spend on this piece?
- What was easy and what was hard?
- What would you do if you had more time?
- What parts show your best effort?
- What did you learn?

For more elaborate and extensive group projects, Slatko creates a specialized evaluation that asks more in-depth questions. For group projects, students are asked to give a more critical evaluation of their performance. This performance assessment is based on criteria such as their working with others, their assessment of the performance of each group member, and what was individually learned. The following shows part of eighth grader Luis Santos' evaluation of the group novel project (his group read *Tom Sawyer*):

- What was your presentation?

My presentation is an audio tape. We are converting *Tom Sawyer* into a play, and we decided it was easier to record it than to do it live. We are also helping the imagination of the audience.

- What are you most proud of?

I'm very proud of my drawings and mainly of the support and confidence the group gives its members.

- Did it (working in a group) help your understanding and enjoyment of the novel? How or how not?

It helped me understand the novel because I looked at it from the point of view of the group members and that helped me understand things I didn't think important before.

The following is from eighth grader Valdesia Pena's evaluation:

- Do you prefer reading alone, with one partner, or as a group? Explain.

With a *group* first. It always gives you a better understanding of what is going on. Also it lets you see other people's opinions and views about that page or chapter. Secondly, [you] learn how to participate in a group and how to conduct yourself.

These evaluations show that these students learned a great deal by working in a group. For Luis, the social learning that transpired not only helped him to better understand the book, but also made him feel supported and appreciated by his group members. Valdesia explains that working with a group helped her have a deeper and more profound experience of literature than she might otherwise have had. Through evaluations such as these, Slatko is able to see what

students are learning and how they are best learning it. The feedback they provide not only tells her what to continue doing, but what to omit as well.

Slatko constantly checks in with her students to be sure they are working together toward the same academic goal. She works hard to ensure that the tasks she assigns will challenge students but not go too far beyond their competency level.

To help students with their writing, Slatko gives them written feedback. She reviews each writing assignment she collects to check its content and structure. She looks for grammatical and mechanical errors, language use, persuasiveness (a Florida Writes! Exam skill) as well as the overall content of a piece. Her responses are both encouraging and critical. Because she has a diversity of students in her class, some who have proficiency in English and some who are still learning English as a second language, she looks at what makes each student's paper work in light of what she knows about the student's level.

Slatko also checks students' progress through their reader responses, as described above. Students share vivid and detailed reflections about how they are responding to the books they are reading through the Accelerated Reader program, and this helps Slatko assess how well they are comprehending their reading.

For Slatko, assessment is in many ways an opportunity for learning. She designs her assessments so that students will learn more about themselves and what they have learned, so that she will learn more about the students and what they have learned, and so that the students can learn from each other. The public display of learning, as exemplified in the group book project presentations, the vocabulary mobile, and the children's book, is encouraged by Slatko. These assessment activities not only provide grades, they are often used as tools for teaching others.

SLATKO'S PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS

Slatko is a responsive, reactive, and reflective teacher. She is responsive in that much of her curriculum and instructional methods are tailored to students' wants and needs. She is reactive in that much of what she learns she tries with immediacy to enact within a lesson; sometimes, as

she reports, right in midstream. She is reflective in that she evaluates her success and progress with her students.

How has Slatko come to be this type of teacher? Much of who Slatko is as a teacher, and what she does as a teacher, is due greatly to her professional sphere. The facets of this professional sphere – the influences of her colleagues, the district office, and professional organizations – are discussed in the following sections.

Colleagues at Ruben Dario

Colleagues have a great and immediate influence on Slatko's classroom decisions. Whether from formal contacts in department meetings or informal ones during shared lunch periods, Slatko says that her conversations with colleagues often serve as springboards for what she decides to do in class. Slatko says she learns a great deal from the English department and specific teachers in it. (Since reading is no longer a required subject in her school, there is no longer a reading department.)

One particular colleague whom Slatko converses with constantly is Dr. Karis MacDonnell, a veteran teacher of 35 years. Slatko explains:

> I've been in Karis' department the last couple of years. She is great at making copies of journal articles and always passing things by. When we have department meetings, she's always sharing something. I've learned a lot from her (Interview, pg. 8).

For example, it is from MacDonnell that Slatko got the idea to use a book as a vehicle for teaching students how to write in a specific genre. She explains how that came about below:

> This project that the kids are doing on "The House That Jack Built" was based on Karis recommending a book to me called *The House That Drak Built*. It's the cutest book . . . that we were reading at Halloween. I decided to read it to the kids, but then it developed [into] getting kids to write in the same genre as authors that they're hearing. That's [how] the idea of letting the kids write their own stories based on "The House That Jack Built" [developed]. That was such a great way to get into computers because [the students could learn and practice the computer techniques of] cut and paste to write the story. So it all kind of fit together (Interview, pg. 12).

Two reading teachers that influence what and how Slatko teaches are June Miralles and Christina Yip. Miralles' use of "Accelerated Reader" really influenced Slatko to consider and eventually use the approach with her own students. Miralles had developed her own book tests and questions (she reads adolescent fiction voraciously) before she adopted Accelerated Reader. After Slatko attended a conference, she went to her principal and suggested that one team pilot it. Miralles' team was willing.

In 1996-97 Slatko acted as a peer teacher (for the first time) for Christina Yip, a beginning reading teacher in the school. Slatko and Yip were required to meet for one and a half hours every two weeks. From their working together they came up with criteria to evaluate students' year-long progress via the final exam. They also exchanged ideas about how to teach the unit "Unwrapping Ancient Mysteries." In 1997, Yip was chosen as Dade County's Best Beginning Teacher of the Year.

In addition to sharing with English/language arts colleagues, Slatko learns from teachers in other disciplines through school inservice offerings and meetings. She explains the kinds of exchanges that take place:

> The state has offered to put money aside to release the students early once a month. They're trying it for three months so that teachers can do staff development in the school. Some schools are using their own in-house people to do the training. The first session that we did here, those of us from language arts shared ideas. A science teacher and math teacher shared ideas, too. For this next [inservice], the assistant principal from another middle school will come and talk to us about writing strategies. I've picked up suggestions from these workshops. Sometimes in our faculty meetings, members of the staff present on things [such as] conflict mediation. We have people from the exceptional student ed department present, so I am always picking up ideas on classroom management and on how to best help those students. Even our principal has done some staff development with us (Interview, pg. 15).

In another instance of in-house sharing, Slatko learned how to integrate technology into her reading instruction, resulting in beneficial learning outcomes for her students. A reading teacher who taught just two periods of reading was working on a doctorate about how teachers adjust to change. Slatko explains:

> [This reading teacher] was meeting with teachers during the planning [periods], and saying: "How can we fit the computer into the curriculum?" She was helping them plan lessons. It was pretty neat that we had her around and that she was freed up to do that . . . . [For example,] I've had kids in the library doing research on [CD-ROM] encyclopedias in the library . . . it's very chaotic in the room, but the kids picked it up very quickly. They're learning from each other, and they help each other, and so I'm pleased with how it's going (Interview, pg. 5).

As shown above, Slatko has made several instructional decisions based on her associations with colleagues at Ruben Dario. Colleagues provide a form of mentorship, giving Slatko an opportunity to impart ideas to, listen to, and brainstorm together with other teachers. The result has led to assignments that are more student-centered and that better foster the curriculum-based competencies expected by the district.

Dade County School District

Four years ago the Dade County School District revamped its language arts/reading curriculum from an objective-based to a competency-based curriculum. Slatko has appreciated this change. She is very impressed with the way that the curriculum now incorporates project-based learning. "It shows how all these different, isolated objectives can be fit together by completing one of the competencies [through a project such as] the stories the kids are writing right now," she explains.

Slatko sees the district as a bank of information for what is possible in a classroom. It is a place to gather blueprints and ideas for teaching reading and language arts. Programs sponsored by the district that Slatko attributes as having a major influence on her classroom decisions include: teacher planning days, summer workshops, a one-week workshop last year on reading and writing, a recent inservice session on how to use the Internet, and the Zelda Glazer Writing Institute. For example, workshops and articles on portfolios have influenced Slatko to incorporate self-evaluation opportunities into most of her assignments. Workshops on reader response and accelerated reading have prompted Slatko to find ways to encourage the entire faculty to incorporate more reading into their classes.

Slatko characterizes the district supervisors of reading and language arts, Norma Bossard and Sallie Snyder, as "phenomenal." She says:

> I have learned so much from them. They have put together some of the most amazing workshops and meetings. That is really where so much of the things that I'm doing with reader response [come from] (Interview, pg. 7).

Professional Organizations

Slatko says that she has received ideas for the classroom through her membership in and attendance at conferences of the Florida Reading Association. She has also learned a great deal through the collaborative sharing she has done with the Dade County Reading Council. Middle school conferences have also influenced what she does in the classroom:

> [In] the middle school conference, reading filters into everything. I've also picked up a lot of ideas on incentives and behavior management, and other things that they use in the other parts of my job . . .[such as] using technology (Interview, pg. 9).

Slatko also belongs to a professional women's organization, which she says has a profound impact on her ideas for what to do in school.

Educating Others

In addition to attending many of the professional development opportunities described above, Slatko has also actively contributed and presented at many conferences and workshops. For example, she gave a presentation at the International Reading Association conference in 1998. At the inception of the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) program, district supervisors asked Slatko to be a part of the writing committee for the Gateways Reading Program for sixth through ninth grades as well as to give workshops, inservice sessions, and presentations on how to implement the CBC.

In February 1997, Slatko gave a workshop on integrating reading and writing skills in the content areas. She gives a sense of what's involved in this kind of work in the following email message:

> Today I provided a two-hour staff development [workshop] on reading and writing strategies for 15 teachers. I presented to the fine arts, vocational, and physical education departments. The presentation went extremely well! I got excellent feedback. Believe me, I was prepared, over prepared. I spent hours gathering materials, looking through notes and handouts from workshops I had taken. I spoke with Sallie [Snyder from the district office], who sent me some great materials, and I bounced ideas off Karis [MacDonnell].

In March 1996, Slatko and three other language arts teachers at Ruben Dario created a presentation and handout on multiple intelligences and how they can be harnessed through literature. The title of the presentation/package was "Show-Off!: Responding to Literature in Nontraditional Ways." Slatko is also active in coordinating literacy events, such as "Literacy Night."

SUMMARY: HOW SLATKO'S CLASSROOM IS INFLUENCED BY HER PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS

To summarize, one can observe several characteristics of Slatko's classroom. Students are given a variety of assignments and forms of instruction so that every student, from those showing no mastery to those showing mastery, has a way of being involved in the main activity of the class – learning to read and think critically. Assignments allow for hands-on experiences and encourage self-evaluation. Strategies and skills are taught directly and are incorporated into lessons that revolve around themes and projects. Writing is a vehicle for helping students understand what they have read. Learning is a social experience in which students interact, collaborate, and help one another. Students are challenged intellectually and required to use critical thinking skills. Students are encouraged to learn from their own experiences, to be introspective and think about their own thoughts and feelings. Literature serves as a link between the student's personal realm and the great wide world of ideas and places.

Slatko's instructional methods are based on several rationales. First, she feels learning involves background building: she tries to provide students with the skills and cultural understandings needed to read books when they leave her classroom. Second, she believes that learning is not always best achieved through indoctrination, but also through the cultivation of the student as a social, critical, and creative being. Third, she sees learning as exploration: that while the course is set by the teacher, the navigation is by the student. And fourth, she feels that learning is associative, that students must learn to see relationships (analogies), as well as draw connections across texts (characters, plot, motifs) and between texts.

Slatko's classroom is not simply a place that promotes student learning, Slatko treats the classroom as a place where she learns as well. Slatko is a reflective teacher who takes time to assess her performance based on her students' performance, and then uses what she learns for future lessons and classes.

When observing Slatko, one can see many professional voices influencing her classroom. The voice of the district is very strong, as one sees that a substantial portion of the students' learning is grounded in competency building exercises and projects. The voices of her reading/language arts colleagues, Karis MacDonnell, June Miralles, and Christina Yip, are also audible; they permeate the types of reader responses and book projects the students do as well as the types of assessments they receive. Many assignment ideas, self-evaluation strategies, classroom management techniques, and approaches for encouraging schoolwide reading attest to the influence of voices outside the school and represent what Slatko learns from professional development activities such as attending and presenting at conferences. The high literacy evident in this classroom is indeed shaped by a variety of influences, all of which are orchestrated by a truly talented teacher, Gail Slatko.

ENDNOTE

1. The only pseudonyms that appear in this case are those of the students.

RELATED MATERIALS FROM THE EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH RESEARCH PROJECT

Research Reports

12002 *Excellence in English in Middle and High School: How Teachers' Professional Lives Support Student Achievement.* Judith A. Langer.

12014 *Beating the Odds: Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well.* Judith A. Langer.

Case Studies

The following site-specific case studies profile teachers, teams of teachers, and central office administrators. These and others will be available beginning in spring 1999.

12003 *Interactions between Central Office Language Arts Administrators and Exemplary English Teachers, and the Impact on Student Performance.* Carla Confer.

12004 *Beating the Odds Over Time: One District's Perspective.* Sallie Snyder.

12005 *A Middle School Teacher Never Stops Learning: The Case of Cathy Starr.* Eija Rougle.

12006 *Vocational School Teacher Engages Students in High Level Reading and Writing: The Case of Janas Masztal.* Steven Ostrowski.

12008 *Collegial Support and Networks Invigorate Teaching: The Case of Marsha S. Slater.* Ester Helmar-Salasoo with Sally Kahr.

12009 *Forging Connections to Advance Literacy in the Middle School: The Case of Rita Gold.* Steven Ostrowski.

13002 *English Instruction in the Classrooms of Four Exemplary Teachers.* Steven Ostrowski.

13005 *Teaming to Teach English to International High School Students: A Case Study.* Paola Bonissone.

13008 *Collegial Networks: A Team of Sixth-Grade Teachers in a Two-Way Bilingual Program.* Gladys Cruz.

In addition, CELA has published a booklet, *Guidelines for Teaching Midde and High School Students to Read and Write Well.* For current availability and an up-to-date list of reports, visit the CELA website: http://cela.albany.edu or call 518-442-5026.

Please help us assess the quality of our research report series by completing and returning the questionnaire below:

NAME OF CASE STUDY: **ACHIEVING HIGH QUALITY READING AND WRITING IN AN URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL: THE CASE OF GAIL SLATKO**

1. Your position:

____ elementary school teacher	___ state ed. agency staff	___ policy maker
____ middle school teacher	___ professional developer	___ researcher
____ high school teacher	___ school administrator	___ education writer
____ college teacher/professor	___ district administrator	other_____

2. Clarity

	Very well					Not at all
a. The concepts in this report were clearly expressed.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. This report was well organized.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

3. Utility

a. Reading this report gave me new information or insight into teaching or learning.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. This report helps the reader understand a current and important problem in education from a different perspective	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
c. I found the ideas offered in this report to be feasible given current realities of policy and practice.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

4. Any other comments or suggestions regarding this report or additional research needs in the area of English and language arts teaching and learning are greatly appreciated.

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_____

_____

Please return this form to: Janet Angelis, Associate Director
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